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who from party motives may be supposed to understate or to exaggerate the situation of public affairs, agree as to the existence of public danger ; is it credible that the great mass of the people can really be either insensible of, or indifferent to, the causes which have produced it ? To bring the public attention to bear upon the subject, may, indeed, be difficult ; but the dread of difficulty must not discourage the endeavour. The inquiry is not, whether this or that system is best calculated, or this or that set of men most disposed and qualified, to promote the public welfare ; but whether, from the present state of public affairs, we can trace the predominancy of a system which threatens the best interests of the country ; and if we can trace such predominancy, the question then arises, whether an administration acting upon that system is still entitled to the confidence and support of the nation. In that inquiry every friend to his country is deeply interested, and to that inquiry the most moderate talents are sufficient ; for, however true it may be, that it requires a superior judgment to decide upon the fitness of means proposed for the improvement of the public happiness, every individual is competent to decide upon
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the actual enjoyment of it. To frame a new system would demand more than ordinary powers ; but to reject a system which has proved most disastrous, and to recur to that system which our ancestors approved and transmitted to us as the most productive of public happiness, requires little effort from the understanding, whilst the heart is permitted to retain and exert its influence. Mere speculations upon government are rarely useful ; and a reference to those periods of our history which some of the most warm admirers of our constitution regard as presenting the most perfect models of public virtue, might, under our present circumstances, appear invidious : I shall therefore confine myself to the events of the present reign, and from the retrospect of what was our situation when the present reign commenced, endeavour to impress the public with a due sense of the importance of investigating the causes which have so varied that situation.

The year 1760, the æra when his Majesty ascended the throne, was an æra truly memorable ; it gave to the nation a sovereign whose youth and character interested their af-

fections not less than their loyalty. The party contests of the immediately preceding periods, however animated by public spirit, or embittered by personal rancor, neither trenching upon the prerogative of the crown, nor endangered the liberties of the subject. The constitution, equally respected by those who possessed, and by those who were candidates for, power, had been found equal to the most alarming exigencies of the state. The treason laws retained their ancient simplicity, and the nation its characteristic justice in the administration of them. Possessed of an extensive territory on the continent of America, we carried on a commerce bounded only by the industry which supplied it; our national debt, which had been, during a series of brilliant and successful wars, upwards of sixty years in contracting, did not even at the peace in the year 1763, exceed 150,000,000/. and the interest payable upon it, together with the immediately subsequent peace establishment, did not exceed 8,500,000/. Thus prosperous at home, and formidable abroad, Great Britain may be regarded in the year 1760 as displaying at once the happiness and energy derivable from a free constitution.

Whether

Whether we now retain that national prosperity, and those energies which produced it, must be determined by a dispassionate comparison of our present circumstances with those which distinguished the happy period of his Majesty's accession to the throne.

In the year 1797 we find the empire of Great Britain contracted; our national debt increased from 150,000,000*l.* to nearly, or perhaps upwards of 400,000,000*l.*; our resources, if not exhausted, so alarmingly diminished as to excite serious apprehensions even in the most confident; our charge of establishment more than doubled, and the influence of the crown increased and increasing, in proportion to the increase of our burthens, and the most strenuous exertions of the best-directed industry scarcely equal to bear up against the charges upon it; the approved state laws of former times declared inadequate to the exigencies of the present; the treason laws extended; the freedom of discussion repressed; attachment to the minister made the criterion of loyalty to the sovereign, and an opposition to the measures of administration branded as sedition against the state; the credit

dit of our national bank shaken by a suspension of payment, unprecedented in its annals ; and whole provinces of our sister kingdom avowedly governed only by the sword.

Such is our situation at home. Is our situation relative to foreign powers more favourable ? The empire of France extended, and its government displaying and directing the gigantic energies of a republic against the best interests of Great Britain ; our former ascendancy in the councils of Europe supplanted by the policy, or destroyed by the arms of France ; our allies falling off, and France improving their defection from us into the most intimate union with herself—Such is our situation in the year 1797. Can the friend of his country contemplate with indifference a change which even a generous enemy might be expected not to view without emotion ?

To retrieve our various public interests may be impracticable, but to alleviate our actual situation, and to avert the additional calamities which may result from it, requires, I trust, but a sincere and steady attention to the causes which have produced it.

May

May a grateful nation, when applying itself to the detection of those causes, venture to rely upon the assertion of a statesman at least as enlightened and as upright as any one of those who at present direct the councils of our sovereign? May it rely upon the assertion of the illustrious Chatham, that in his time there existed behind the throne an influence more powerful than the throne itself? If reliance may be had upon that assertion, which was not hastily made, but the result of much experience and grave reflection; and if that influence continues to operate, one, and not the least mischievous of the causes of that sad reverse which has taken place in our public affairs is discovered; for wherever such an influence prevails, private distress and national disaster must ensue. Under such an influence, those salutary provisions which a free constitution prescribes as checks upon the exercise of power, cannot, without public virtue, be operative to useful purposes, and are too frequently made subservient to the worst. Let us consider what might be the nature, and if such was the nature, what must be the danger, of such an influence.

As to the nature of the influence, it might be the influence of a favourite, who, without responsibility, directed or controlled the councils of those who were constitutionally responsible for public measures. Ministers under such an influence, holding their stations dependent upon their obsequiousness, ought rather to be considered as the tools of the favourite, than as the council of the crown, or the guardians of public liberty.

From such characters, what public benefit ought, or rather what public calamity ought not to be expected? Degraded in their own estimation, they have a species of interest in degrading all around them, and the corruption of others becomes absolutely essential to their individual security. Each link in the chain must be upheld; the minister must uphold the favourite; to the minister's claim of confidence the representative body must surrender its deliberative character; and to the professions of the representative must the constituent yield his censorial power. Should one link fail, the whole system is destroyed: should the constituent resume and effectually assert the right of examining the conduct of his

his representatives ; or should the representative qualify his confidence in the minister, or the minister prefer the discharge of public duty to the temptations of wealth and power, the system is no more. That a system which requires the sacrifice of that integrity which dignifies station, and of that vigilance which is essential to public security, should have existed for any length of time in any country calling itself free, is hardly credible ; but that it should have existed for any time in any country, and not have produced the most baleful effects, is impossible. I will not affirm that such was the nature of the influence to which the erect spirit of the illustrious Chatham was required to bend, but I will assert, that, if it was, we ought to be surprised, not that we are humiliated as a nation, but that we retain any of the forms of a free constitution.

The influence might be of another, but not less injurious description : it might be the influence of a favourite system founded upon maxims the most pernicious and hostile to a free constitution ; a system which, deeming the liberties of the subject incompatible with the claims of the crown, seeks to

strengthen the latter by the depression of the former.

The influence of such a system I have stated as being not less injurious than that of a favourite ; but is it not in fact more malignant in its principle and more extensively direful in its effects ? The sovereign who submits to the influence of a favourite, may find an apology in human weakness ; his confidence may be the result of tried or approved friendship, or founded on a sincere conviction that the favourite to whom he entrusts the happiness of his people, is better qualified than himself to effect it. Thus a kind motive may extenuate what it cannot justify ; but the principle of an evil system is without apology, its purpose is deliberately formed, and the means of its accomplishment are as deliberately applied. The influence of a favourite may occasionally be checked by remorse, or may even receive an useful direction from the impulse of the affections ; it may be determined by the caprice, or by the death of the sovereign, and must be by his own : but the influence of an evil system has no such bounds nor check, nor

owns any impulse which is not essential to its object ; and though the means which it employs for its attainment may vary, they can differ only in their degree of turpitude. It would ill become me to affirm which, or, indeed, whether either of these influences was that which the noble statesman arraigned before his country ; but I will venture to assert, that from either of such influences, effects similar to those which we now experience would probably have ensued. Whether the nation has duly regarded the patriot warning, or whether it is warranted in the total neglect of it, may be thought by some to allow of a difference of opinion, but surely it ought to allow of none in the mind of the minister. His noble father affirmed, not in the fervor of debate, but in the seriousness of conviction, that an influence existed behind the throne, more powerful than the throne itself. His assertion was true, or it was false : if true, such influence continues to exist, or it has ceased to exist ; if it continues to exist—who is the minister who lends himself to its purpose ?—A son of Chatham.—If it has ceased to exist, when did it cease ? and why has the minister withheld from a people who still revere the autho-

rity of his father's assertion, the grateful tidings of an event so interesting to their welfare, and so connected with his own fame? If the assertion was unfounded, and no such influence did ever exist, the nation is peculiarly called upon to cast about for the discovery of some other cause adequate to the production of such lamentable effects.

The influence of a favourite, or of an evil system, is dangerous to a free nation in proportion to the sacrifice which it demands of public virtue. But such sacrifice may be required, not to uphold a favourite of the crown, not to give effect to an evil system, but to gratify the overbearing arrogance, or the wild and inordinate ambition of a minister, or to supply the profusion of a corrupt and profligate administration, which without system to direct or object to pursue; without industry to acquire, or judgment to profit of information, and solely relying on the miserable expedient of the day, finds itself involved in measures which it cannot pursue or justify, but from which it cannot recede, and for which it in vain attempts to apologise. But whatever may be the cause which demands

mands the sacrifice of public virtue, its effects are equally fatal to a free constitution.

Montesquieu has successfully attempted to attribute to each form of government the principle essential to its security ; despotism must be upheld by terror, and honour is sufficient to the purpose of unmixed monarchy. But when a constitution has public liberty for its end, it must perish, unless it has public virtue for its support. Organise its powers as variously as human policy can contrive, if its end be the same, the forms of a free constitution may, but the spirit of freedom cannot, survive that public virtue which is its vital principle. A free people may be conquered by a foreign force, but they must be corrupted before they can be enslaved by their own magistracy. Of the importance of public virtue few can really doubt, though many may affect to ridicule its exertions.—And here it may be material to remark, that as the multitude are generally taught to ridicule what designing men would wish to destroy ; it is not the least alarming symptom of our present situation, that many are disposed to stigmatise as knavery what in better times would have been honoured as patriotism.

But

But let us here consider in what public virtue really consists: it may be regarded in two points of view, as it relates to the duties of those entrusted with the powers of the state, and as it relates to the people. As it relates to the people, public virtue appears to consist in a cordial submission to the established laws, in a readiness to supply the public wants, and in a steady vigilance and spirit to secure and to defend the public rights; but how are these duties to be discharged if inquiry be neglected? Public virtue, as it relates to those entrusted with the powers of the state, consists in an anxious endeavour to secure and to improve the general happiness, by well-weighed and salutary laws, and by the upright administration of them; to render the public wants as few as possible, and to mark upon every occasion a sincere respect for the public liberty.

It is rarely necessary to instruct a free people in their public duties, but it may be occasionally necessary to remind them of their rights. The rights of a free people are valuable, not merely as they regard the individual, but as they contribute to the general se-

curity ; and as it is a public duty to defend them, the individual cannot renounce, nor, without guilt, even relax in his vigilance to preserve them. Whenever, therefore, a generally prevailing contempt, or even neglect of the public rights appears, we may reasonably conclude that the change has been produced by an influence hostile to the spirit of a free constitution ; and whatever may be the nature of that influence, either the constitution must destroy it, or it will destroy the constitution.

I have already described the actual situation of our public affairs ; and happy should I be, if, in revising the page, I felt myself chargeable with having exaggerated its calamities. Total indifference to the pressure of such accumulated evils, is impossible, and I cannot impute to my fellow-subjects such unnatural apathy ; but thinking as I do, that such accumulation of evils could never have been produced, if the claims of public virtue had been duly regarded and enforced, it may be useful to point out those occasions where prejudice and neglect on the part of the people have allowed of ministers involving

us in a situation from which even the united efforts of superior talents, actuated by superior virtue, will probably be insufficient to work our deliverance.

Our situation, as it regards our domestic relations, exhibits an increase of our burthens and diminution of our rights.

Our burthens have been increased principally by two events, the American war, and the contest in which we are now engaged with France. The American war in its commencement was, I believe, sanctioned by the public opinion: the present contest with France has been rather endured than approved by the majority of the people. The claim of America in the commencement of the contest, was much short of that independency which she ultimately established; but to coerce America was thought by some desirable, because its success would produce revenue; and it was deemed practicable, because America was thought to be defenceless. The latter sentiment was weak, the former was wicked. America had her rights, and she found, even in her woods, energies sufficient

ficient to assert and make them respected. What did Great Britain gain by the contest? Thousands of lives had been lost, millions of money had been expended; but at last the nation gained experience, and felt in their misfortunes that respect for the rights of others which will, under any combination of circumstances, prove the most protective of their own. An apologist for the public opinion might urge that it was influenced by misrepresentation, and so I believe it was in many instances; but surely it cannot be received as an apology, that he who by his opinion has sanctioned the death of thousands, and the numberless miseries necessarily attendant on civil war, misunderstood the real cause of difference, and had omitted to inquire what was the object which in its attainment would terminate the contest. Inquiry might have discovered the truth, and the discovery might have prevented the calamities which ensued. To inquire, and to be thoroughly informed of the motive and object of any measure which the public opinion is to sanction, is therefore the duty of the individual; and to communicate that information which is necessary to the forming of a sound

and correct opinion, is the duty of those who are entrusted with the public interests. Had this duty been faithfully discharged, had inquiry preceded decision, America had still been ours, and we should not only have spared the lives of thousands, and have saved millions of treasure, but should now have been strong in her strength and rich in her resources.

But it may be asked, are the people to assume a deliberative character? are they to decide upon questions of war and peace? are the functions of parliament to be superseded, or its determinations to be controlled by the public voice? To such questions, which have been often put, I answer, that upon every measure in support of the propriety or justice of which, ministers rely upon the public opinion, that opinion ought to be deliberately formed and fairly collected; and I affirm, that upon every measure which materially affects the public interests, the public voice, without superseding the functions of parliament, ought to be heard, and without controlling the determinations of parliament, it ought to be respected. To what influence
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were we indebted for the termination of the American war? To the public voice.—To what influence were we indebted for the continuance of peace and amity with Russia? To the public voice.—Where was that voice to be heard? In every quarter—in your public meetings and private converse. The minister who had so deeply pledged himself to the measure of war, felt in that instance, and acknowledged, the superior authority of public opinion: because, perhaps, it may be said he heard it adopted in the only place in which he considers himself at liberty to attend to it—in the two houses of parliament. But how did he find it there? because it was too loudly expressed not to be heard, and too powerfully supported not to be regarded.—

The instances alluded to show the superior advantages which are derivable from the freedom and practice of political discussion. In the latter instance, the minister, less guarded than usual, had distinctly stated the provocation and object of the proposed war. The provocation, instead of exciting the sympathy of the nation, was generally deemed ridiculous, and the avowed object insignificant.

Had the nation been, upon every similar occasion, equally informed of the motive and object of its wars, I sincerely believe that it would have escaped the miseries of many. For injury it would have claimed reparation; for insult it would have demanded apology: the nature of the provocation would have determined the nature of the atonement, and the atonement would have been the only object of the nation. But there are mysteries in government which ordinary minds cannot unravel.—Under bad governments such mysteries are many; under good governments they are few. The wrong that is not felt by a free and spirited nation cannot be a just cause for war. A minister may be offended, and the state neither injured nor insulted; but the minister who presumes to identify himself with the state will draw forth the strength of his country to resent what he dares not avow to be the motive of his conduct; and, to disguise its turpitude, will claim credit for being actuated by reasons of policy too refined for the public to distinguish, or too intricate for their understanding to comprehend. But an enlightened and vigilant nation, whilst it is free, will claim and assert its right of discussion.

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It will not consent “ to steep its sword in the blood of thousands,” to gratify the spleen, or to give additional extent to the power or patronage, of a minister; nor will it submit to injury or insult from a foreign power, to secure to a minister the continuance of that ease and of those enjoyments which are derivable only from peace. Such a nation, bearing with equal mind the events which may befall it, neither elated by prosperity nor depressed by adversity, but pursuing that steady and dignified course which justice and honour prescribe, would look forward to the issue of any war in which it might be engaged, with confidence proportioned to its endeavours to prevent it.

But if inquiry be the duty of a free people, it remains to consider, whether the contest in which we are now engaged with France, and which is the second great cause of our weight of burthens, might not have been prevented if such duty had been faithfully discharged. The effects of the contest are indeed lamentable; but if the original provocation justified the measure, and if every endeavour, of which the
national

national honour would allow, has been made to terminate it, ministers are not to be condemned for the consequences: as guardians of the public interests, they are entitled to liberal allowance; and ought not to suffer by a measuring cast; the object being rather to reform the system, than to criminate the instruments of it. But should there appear, not merely a want of capacity in the conduct of the war, but extreme profligacy in their engaging in it, let the country, at least, withdraw that confidence which has already produced such mischievous effects; and which confidence, if continued, may complete our ruin. The contest has already involved us in a debt of millions: the lives which it has cost are less easily calculable; for they are rarely, beyond the moment, the concern of those who have not to deplore the loss of a father or child, or brother, or to assume the weeds of the widow. The eye of sensibility may, indeed, fix itself upon the scroll, and indulge in participating the sorrows which its contents must communicate; but the more stern virtues, the high philosophy of statesmen, may derive additional pride from the magnitude of that calamity

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which presses most widely upon domestic happiness.

The war, in which we are engaged with France, is said to be new in its necessity, and it is certainly unparalleled in its effects—its aspect has been more terrible, and its range more extended, than any preceding war. But whence it acquired that aspect, or from what measures its calamities have received such unprecedented extent, is an inquiry, which, with the present generation, ought surely to possess the deepest interest. It should at least excite the public attention and call forth the public opinion; and the public opinion, dispassionately formed, is all that can be wished for; should it acquit ministers, and sanction the continuance of those measures which they have hitherto pursued, such measures will thereby lose nothing of their efficiency; or should it reprobate those measures, it may indeed involve their authors in disgrace, but it may, if any thing can, save our country from destruction.

The history of the present war is full of events most truly instructive: let us at least
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endeavour to trace the principles which have produced them.

France, under its ancient system of government, had many abuses to correct ; and the most strenuous and eloquent of those who have sounded the alarm to Europe, and combined nations against her, has candidly admitted, that, had she contented herself with applying those correctives which would have rendered her government more perfect without varying its form, he should have rejoiced at the accession to her liberty. But to break up the ancient foundations of her government, to sweep away the various privileged orders, which, in the opinion of some, constitute at once the strength and beauty of civil establishment, was an outrage which every regular government was bound to resent.

No man can be an apologist for the crimes of France ; but it may be material to discriminate between the assertion of a right and the abuse of a power. I hold and trust that I am constitutionally correct in maintaining, that, in the institution of government, its only legitimate object is the welfare of the people,
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and that every nation has the right to reform, vary, and even recast its government, if experience prove it defective or injurious to the public welfare. They who maintain the contrary, however acquainted they may be with the forms of government, are wholly ignorant of the spirit of a free constitution. Delegated power is necessarily a trust ; it cannot be unconditionally conferred ; its object cannot be renounced, it is unalienable.

They who affect to dread the influence of this doctrine, may be suspected of having some other cause for their fears than the doctrine itself. The doctrine which lays the foundation of power in a people's choice and affections, gives it a stability and character which it cannot otherwise acquire. But there were many, some of high rank and station, some distinguished by the splendor of their talents, and others by their private virtues, who solemnly protested against this, as they termed it, new theory of government. It is from this circumstance, that the point acquires its importance. No measure was taken to obstruct France in the work of reform ; her right to that extent appeared to be acknowledged,

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ledged,

ledged, at least, by Great Britain. The total subversion of her ancient system gave the alarm. The wisdom of the measure might be reasonably disputed, but her right to adopt the measure was the point contested.

If France had such right, the other powers of Europe had no right to obstruct her in the exercise of it. If France had not the right, the interference of the other powers of Europe still could only be justified by their wish to re-establish that government, and to restore those rights, which had been destroyed by the usurpation.

The object of the interference of foreign powers, thus stated and avowed, would have presented to the public mind a question of right, and a question of expediency. The inquiry would not have been difficult, and in no event could its result have been prejudicial. If the result had been, that France, as an independent nation, had the right to provide for her own happiness and security by such form of government as appeared to herself the best suited to those objects, our interference would have been pronounced unjust. If the
result

result had been the reverse, namely, that France had not the right to throw off her ancient government, and that we had the right, and in policy ought, to attempt to compel her to resume it; the attainment of the object of our interference would not have been more remote from its being distinctly defined and candidly avowed. But if it were admitted, that foreign nations had a right to interfere with the internal government of France, it would have been difficult to have maintained, that the government of France had not an equal right to interfere with the internal governments of other countries. They, therefore, who objected to the conduct of France, when she threatened such interference, must have separated themselves (at least if consistency were regarded) from those who maintained that foreign powers might interfere with the internal government of an independent state. The advantage which the nation would have derived from this course of inquiry is obvious: its views, distinctly understood, would have allowed of, at least, consistency in the choice of means, and concentrated energy in the direction of them. But the then ministers, though they would not rest their interference

upon such ground of right, found it convenient to make a common cause with those who did ; and hence the many inconsistencies, not to use an harsher expression, which are observable in their conduct. If our interference was not to be justified by the right of Great Britain to compel France to resume her ancient form of government ; how are we to justify the forcing of other independent states to become parties in the contest ? If our interference was to be so justified, our zeal might have betrayed us into the opinion, that such interference was not only a right but a duty, and that in such a crisis neutrality was a crime. This persuasion might have accounted for our conduct towards some states, Genoa, Tuscany, &c. ; but how would it have excused our forbearance with respect to others, Sweden, Denmark, &c. ? I wish this difference of conduct supported only the charge of inconsistency ; it furnishes, I fear, an additional proof that the “ age of chivalry “ is indeed no more.”

But it has been urged, that the cause of quarrel was common to all Europe, not because France had subverted her ancient system,

tem, but because France, upon the ruins of that system, was building up a fabric which would overtower the palaces, and even endanger the thrones, of kings. Had this been stated to the nation as a reason for war, however it might have alarmed sovereigns, who rely more upon the prejudices than upon the reason and affections of their subjects, may I not venture to affirm, that it would not have disturbed the tranquillity of Great Britain? The thrones of despots might have trembled to their base, but the throne which is upheld by a free people, has claims which even licentiousness must respect, and a strength to which even the most daring violence must submit.

The minister, ambitious to “ride in the whirlwind and to direct the storm,” dared not confide the question to the decision of a generous people: he knew that an enlightened public could not allow such apprehensions to be sufficient to justify hostilities. Eloquence might, indeed, expatiate upon the right of the neighbourhood to pull down a house when in flames; but it never could have satisfied a free and generous people, that
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it was lawful to produce the flames in order to pull down the house ; or that the house, being actually in flames, it was lawful to enter its apartments for pillage, to force its cabinets, or to corrupt its servants, in order to improve the opportunity of plunder.—The moral sense of a nation must be extinct before such doctrine can make its way.

I have stated, that there were persons of rank, great talents, and unblemished fame, who held our interference in the internal affairs of France to be a duty of the highest necessity. To opinions sincerely entertained, whatever may be their tendency, or however the country may deplore their effects, at least indulgence is due; and if those who called upon Europe to vindicate the monarchy and the privileged orders of France, and to oppose the republican system which she had preferred, really considered the interests of humanity and social order to be involved in the success of the measure, they may claim, and are entitled to, gratitude for their intentions. But how are we to explain the coalition of such characters with an administration
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which not only did not approve of our interference upon such grounds, but which did most distinctly affirm that the mere threat by one state to interfere with the internal government of another was of itself a sufficient cause for war? The effective co-operation of persons maintaining such opposite doctrine could not reasonably be expected; but the appearance of union was desirable. And here the Machiavelian system opens upon us. The minister felt the then opposition to be strong, although his underlings were instructed to describe it as contemptible. To divide was his object; and the opportunity was too tempting to be resisted. Without pledging himself to act upon the doctrines of Mr. Burke, it was sufficient that he opposed the principles of Mr. Fox. The friendship of years, a friendship which united all that was splendid in genius, profound in knowledge, and graceful in the affections, was dissolved; and the assertion of those great constitutional points which had so long occupied the attention and directed the measures of opposition, lost all its importance. The affairs of France absorbed every consideration; former friendships were sacrificed, and the most virulent resentments were forgotten; and the coun-
cils

cils of the country were entrusted to a new cabinet made up of characters of the most discordant principles, which having nothing in common for their object, must have been eternally at variance in their pursuits, had not some been silenced who refused to be convinced, and others got rid of, whom temptation could not corrupt nor authority subdue.

But though they were not agreed in the object of the war, they were agreed, it may be said, at least in their abhorrence of a system which had murder and rapine for its support, and the extinction of all the orders and virtues of society for its end. The most powerful eloquence was employed to detail the crimes of France ; and surely they lost nothing of their turpitude in the description. Humanity, astonished at the firmness of the hand and terrors of the eloquence which recorded them, perused with horror, and retired with indignation from the recital. But the passions of the public were to be inflamed, because their passions were to instruct their reason ; and the dictates of plain sense and practical morality were to be despised, because they relied on the decision of unbiassed judgment.

The

The crimes of France were by some deemed of themselves sufficient to justify the confederacy of Europe against her : but as the crimes of France could not secure success to the confederacy, there were others who doubted the wisdom, and who dared even to dispute the justice, of the measure. Here I must pause, being arrived at a period where the duty of public inquiry most seriously attached, and where not only all the arts of the most brilliant eloquence were exerted to mislead the judgment of the nation, but the most formidable influences were brought forward to overawe its decision. The question was made to assume a new form ; it was not, what ought to be our conduct to restore the ancient order of things in France, but what ought to be our conduct to preserve the established order of things in Great Britain. The alarm was sounded, not for a foreign monarchy, but for our own. The standard of loyalty was erected, and they who were not willing to pledge all their love for the king were declared to have none for the constitution. Associations were formed, not merely to repress what the law had defined to be sedition, but to persecute that as sedition

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which

which our ancestors had approved and enjoined as duty. A system of espionage the most malignant in its principle, and in its effects the most destructive of social happiness, was deliberately established, under the pretext of preserving social order; and the most gross libels on the constitution were published by these associations, under the pretext of rescuing it from the calumnies of Paine, and of giving it additional worth in the estimation of an intelligent people. We shall content ourselves with a single extract; *ex pede Herculem*.

“ Let us now see what would be the effect
 “ of this independent parliament if obtained.
 “ By an independent parliament, in
 “ the language of the present times, is to be
 “ understood a parliament in which the majority
 “ would oppose any administration:
 “ now no arguments are necessary to prove,
 “ that with such a parliament no public business
 “ whatever could be transacted, nor
 “ any government subsist. But it will be
 “ said, This is not what is wished for, but
 “ one in which the members shall be always
 “ ready

“ ready to support the measures of ministers
 “ when right, and to resist them when
 “ wrong, unawed and uninfluenced, and
 “ guided only by the dictates of their own
 “ judgment and conscience. This indeed is
 “ what every wise man would desire, but
 “ no wise man will expect to see, as no
 “ such assembly, if numerous, ever existed
 “ in this or in any country, from the begin-
 “ ning of the world to the present hour; nor
 “ ever can, unless mankind were melted
 “ down and run in a new mould: as they
 “ now are formed, in every numerous assem-
 “ bly, there must be some who have no
 “ judgment, and others who have no con-
 “ science, and some who have neither: take
 “ away self-interest, and all these will have
 “ no star to steer by, but must sail without a
 “ compass, just as the gales of favour or re-
 “ sentment, of popular absurdity, or their
 “ own shall direct them: a minister there-
 “ fore must be possessed of some attractive
 “ influence to enable him to draw together
 “ those discordant particles and unite them
 “ in a firm and solid majority, without
 “ which he can pursue no measures of pub-
 “ lic utility with steadiness or success. *An*

*“ independent House of Commons is no part
“ of the English constitution*.”*

When men thus openly avow that an independent House of Commons is no part of the constitution, the superior excellence of which they profess to vindicate, can we be surprised at disaffection? There always have been disaffected characters; but though good governments be not free from them, bad governments will produce them. A government too weak to effect, or too wicked to regard the public welfare, has certainly not very powerful claims on the public gratitude; but should such a government profess to pursue the line of the constitution, can we be surprised that a constitution charged with the defects or vices of a weak or profligate minister, should lose something of its claim to reverence in the eyes of a free people? Associations were however formed, professing indeed merely to defend the constitution of these kingdoms from the pernicious influence of those principles which had so extensively afflicted France.

* No. 9, Association Papers, p. 129. Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform, by Soame Jenyns, Esq.

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There were many persons who held that such associations, even if the professed had been the real object, were not only unnecessary but also impolitic. They held them to be unnecessary, because they had been taught to think that every British subject was already pledged to defend the constitution, and that it required no new engagement to secure to their country the full benefit of such pledge. They held them to be impolitic, because, in the nature of their institution, they conferred large powers, without adequate responsibility in those, who were to take the lead in the conduct of them. Have not events justified the objections? What addition of strength has the country derived from those who so liberally pledged their lives and fortunes? Our danger has increased, or is diminished. If it has increased, where are our associations? If it has diminished, whence the necessity of new and unprecedented restraints on our national liberties? They, who justify such restraints, must maintain that danger from the influence of French principles still exists; but if the associations which were to defend us against such danger are no more, when the increase of the danger demanded more active vigilance, are we not warranted

in considering either their institution as useless, or the members of them as deserters of the cause which they had pledged themselves to support? But a crime is not to be imputed where an acquittal may be had upon error of judgment. Events, however, have not only justified the opinion as to the inutility of the measure, but also the dread of its pernicious effects. The association which took the lead thought it prudent to instruct the people in the nature, principles, and practical advantages of the constitution. The press teemed with their productions, which were rapidly circulated throughout the kingdom. The most familiar forms of communication were adopted; dialogues, tales, and fables, were invented and revived to suit the understanding of the different ranks to which they were addressed. Some of them were afterwards collected and published in the compilation from which I have already extracted a most curious reading upon the constitution and use of parliament. That such a passage should be found in a compilation professing such an object, did certainly surprise me; but more particularly so, when I reflected that there were in that association men generally well informed, who were not only members but even the acting committee. But

But though the public might not expect to find such a description of parliament, yet I must take leave to confess that I did not expect from the associations a very bold and spirited display of the genius, character, and principles of a free constitution. I was aware that such a work required talents of a very different description from those which are sufficient to the purpose of dividing a nation and of breaking up the confidences of social life ; that it required a mind capable of sympathizing with the general interests, and of sacrificing its most inveterate prejudice for their advancement. I mean not to affirm that there was not to be found in that association a mind so qualified ; but if there was, I most sincerely lament that to its exertions the public instruction was not confided ; for I verily believe that a masterly delineation of the principles of our constitution would have saved us from many of the evils of our present situation. A more particular and correct knowledge of our own rights, whether denominated natural, civil, or political, ought, and I believe would have inspired a more general and sincere regard for the rights of others ; for “ knowledge humanizes mankind, and reason inclines to
“ mild-

“ mildness ; but prejudice eradicates every generous disposition.” We should have found in the display of the genuine principles of freedom, that liberty is of a benevolent and social, and not of a gloomy and vindictive nature ; and that the destruction of the liberties of France was not essential to the security of our own.

But if the defence of our own constitution was only a pretext, and the hurrying of the country into a war with France was the real object, to such a purpose the light of reason had been fatal, and a mist was more favourable than total darkness. To raise it, a bold, inflammatory, and seductive eloquence was too successfully employed ; ancient prejudices were revived, and new provocations were insisted upon. The liberal and approved policy of former times, which favoured and assisted public inquiry, was wholly abandoned ; and the nation found itself engaged in a war without any defined object, which in its attainment would restore the blessings of peace. If at this period the duty of public discussion had been faithfully discharged, I will not assert that the war would have been prevented, but I sincerely believe that its views
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being more precisely understood, the public support of them would have been proportionally less. If the re-establishment of the monarchy of France had been discovered to be the real object of the war, whatever difference of opinion might have prevailed, as to the justice of the measure, I verily believe that a majority of the country would have protested against the policy of it. If the securing to Holland the exclusive navigation of the Scheldt had been avowed to be the object, the wish of our ally, that we should not interfere, would probably have been generally thought a sufficient justification of our forbearance. If the decree of the 19th November, 1792, had been urged as the provocation, the nation would probably have accepted of the repeal of that decree as a sufficient atonement. If the spirit of fraternization which prevailed in France had been found to have created the alarm of our government, perhaps the spirit of a free constitution had been, at least by those who respect that spirit, deemed a sufficient security against the influence of French principles in Great Britain. If the suspicion that France was aiming at universal empire, had been insinuated as a reason for war, the grounds of that suspicion would probably

have been required to justify it. Such might, and I believe would have been, the effects of discussion; but where advantage is to be taken of each particular prejudice, a very different course must be pursued. Had the views of the minister been distinctly presented, those who required the re-establishment of the monarchy of France, and who were ready “to wade through slaughter to a throne,” would have reprobated the war which had not that for its object; and they who objected to the conduct of the government of France, but acknowledged its legitimacy, would have reprobated the principle of a war which aimed at the subversion of such government, not because it had abused, but because it had usurped its powers; whilst they who knew the strength and resources of a free constitution, would have reprobated a war which had for its object the destruction of the government of France as essential to the security of Great Britain.

It is certainly true, that impressions upon the public mind, however produced, are not easily effaced; but the minister who owes his security to popular delusion, may be betrayed by his fears, or impeached by his accomplices. The
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purpose which he dares not to avow he cannot openly, and therefore cannot effectually, pursue ; and the irregularity of his end is detected by the discordance of his measures : and every step in the conduct of the present war has shown its object to be different from that upon which a majority of even those who have supported it founded their assertion, that it was just and necessary.

But though they who approved the war, whom we believe to have been by no means a majority of the nation, were not agreed as to what ought to be its object, yet they were agreed as to its justice and necessity. The views of all were to be consulted, and each flattered himself that his view might eventually be the view of the minister. War was the rallying point ; and if war was all for which the minister engaged, he has “ kept the “ word of promise to the ear,” however he may have “ broken it to the hope.” We are not disposed to think very highly of the sincerity of the minister ; but surely they who complain of his want of it in this instance, ought rather to blush for their own credulity. The views of those who most loudly called upon the country to take part in the confederacy

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against

against France were confessedly different, and even irreconcilable. To satisfy the views of all was consequently impossible. France willed to be free; and the will of a nation to be free, and the opinion that she is so, are of themselves sufficient to create an energy, and to supply a strength, incalculable in the cabinets of princes; and by such exertions the views of many were disappointed; for they who cannot be restrained by justice, may be humbled by disaster; and force may subdue those whom compunction cannot check.—The minister, therefore, when he yielded to the imperiousness of necessity, might reasonably expect at least the indulgence of his associates; but in vain did he claim it. The eloquence which had been directed against France recoiled upon the councils and measures of Great Britain.

The recognition of the republican government of France was by some branded as the basest perfidy; whilst others, equally bent on the re-establishment of the monarchy of France, regarded it as a measure of merely temporary but profound policy, a measure by which France might be lulled into a state of security, which would probably prove more
fatal

fatal to her than had done the confederacy of princes against her. They conceived that the acknowledgment which could be justifiably withheld might be justifiably retracted; and if existing circumstances are to determine the competency of one nation to treat with another (which is a monstrous position), I know not how to deny that a change in the circumstances which had allowed of the acknowledgment of the competency of France, might require and justify the retracting of such acknowledgment. To produce such change of circumstances, became, therefore, a more seriously important object to those who viewed in the monarchy of France the only point that could federally connect her with other states; but such change was, perhaps, of all events, the most to be deprecated by Great Britain. The republican government of France, when declared to be competent to preserve the relations of peace and amity, became competent to discuss the merits of the contest, and to negotiate for its termination; and every event which threatened that government, must, if peace was really the object of ours, have obstructed its attainment. An explicit dis-

disavowal of every sinister purpose, and a solemn recognition of the **right** of independent states to provide for **their own** happiness, would probably have been received by France as pledges, if not of the good-will, at least of the sincerity of our government in its overtures for peace. Such we think was the line of conduct which good faith and sound policy would have pursued as preparatory to actual negotiation. The real or supposed aggressions of France might then have been distinctly stated; and the nature and degree of atonement would, when once understood, have brought the negotiation to a very short issue. If such atonement was refused, it might, indeed, have raised a question of expediency, whether it ought to be insisted upon; but at all events it would have presented to both nations the real points of difference between them. If such difference had been found to be a squabble about plunder, the sense and feeling of either nation would probably have protested against its claim to their sanction or support. If, on the contrary, it had been found to be one of those grave and weighty points upon which nations might fairly differ, mutual sacrifices might have

have accommodated the difference, which nothing but the destruction of one of the contending parties could otherwise determine.

I have now reached that period when I might reasonably expect that, as the government of France was declared to be capable of discussing the merits of the contest, the people of Great Britain would have been prepared to state what were the motives which had excited it, and what were the objects which in their attainment would determine it.

I have carefully examined the proceedings of the first negotiation; but I cannot trace even an expression which points at any one of the alleged provocations, nor a single claim which could give to Great Britain a security which she might not have equally received before she became a party in the war. Was the exclusive navigation of the Scheldt to be secured to the States of Holland? Was an apology to be made for the offensive decree of the 19th November, or was the principle of that decree to be solemnly renounced? Was the ambition of France to be checked by
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the cession of any part of her ancient European territory, or the influence or propagation of her opinions to be in any manner restrained? If such were the objects of the war, they had ceased to be the objects of its continuance before the negotiation, for they are not even glanced at in the project for peace. But when and how did they cease to be so? by our having, before that period, attained them, or by our not being at that period in a situation to insist upon them? If we had before that period attained the objects of the war, the overtures for peace ought to have been earlier. If those objects which had originally provoked the war were still unattained, but were abandoned in the negotiation, from the want of force to secure them, it might, and probably would, have been remarked, that the nation which is too weak to enforce those claims upon which it rests the justice and necessity of having engaged a in-war, is not very consistent in raising and insisting upon new claims, which, if resisted, are to justify its continuance.

I mean not to enter into any detail of the conduct of the war, or of the negotiations for peace; but I must occasionally refer to measures,

fures, in order to illustrate the importance of public inquiry. If, at a period when every thinking man might have been expected to be prepared to state the object of the war, the most intelligent of those who are not closely connected with ministers, admitted that they could only conjecture, and that their attention to the measures of government had served but to convince them, that neither of the objects professed was the real object; the nation had surely some right to expect that ministers would have condescended to communicate that information which the most anxious attention had been unable to acquire, and without which, the public sanction of public measures could not be justified. But the communication which may entitle to praise, may expose to censure.—Ministers kept their own counsel, and by the most surprising variety in their measures, baffled even the researches of their adherents to ascertain their precise purpose: to obtain public approbation they were not solicitous; the continuance of a blind confidence was all that they required.—The minister had possessed the confidence of the nation: it was cast upon him by descent. But no title is exempt

from conditions; and he who takes by descent, takes subject to the conditions of the original grant.—Even the confidence which a nation's gratitude had conferred on the illustrious Chatham had its limits.—He who had sworn on the great charter of liberty, to wage eternal war with every influence which might endanger it, must have forfeited his title to that confidence, had he been found associated with men, whose principles he could not but detest; or acting upon a system, the object of which he dared not to avow.—Confidence may be conferred, but it ought rarely, if ever, to be demanded; and the minister who frequently recurs to the claim of it, must not be surprised if his pretensions to it should become proportionally doubtful. The confidence which is due to sincerity of intention, is seldom withheld; but as the best disposed are not always possessed of that ability which may be necessary to their purpose, a nation may reasonably expect a minister to state his views, before it pledges itself to sanction and support them. Had the nation yielded to the claim of confidence, the American war would probably have been of longer duration, and a war with Russia had not been prevented. The confidence,

dence, therefore, which supercedes the duty of public inquiry upon points of serious national concern, if it does not always betray, must always endanger the public interests.

I must, however, here do justice to the nation. The spirit of discussion did at this period begin to revive; and though the stream of public opinion was troubled, yet if allowed to pursue its course, it would have worked itself pure; to divert it from its course became the object of ministers, and various were the means which they employed. An alarm for the constitution was again sounded; and, at a moment when disaffection, which, to a certain, but very inconsiderable, degree, prevailed, might have been, if not wholly subdued, at least overawed, by the display of the principles and energies of the constitution; measures were resorted to, which struck at the constitution itself. The plea of necessity was insisted upon; and that plea, which could not weigh against the respect claimed to a private charter, was deemed sufficient to justify, at least, the suspension of the best privilege secured by the Bill of Rights. He, with whose eloquence the whole kingdom had re-

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founded,

founded, when the charter of the East India Company was thought to be endangered, was the minister who urged that necessity could justify the suspension of one of the great charters of our national liberties; and he, who owed the success of his exertions to the animated zeal which he had inspired, and which brought the nation to the throne of their sovereign in assertion of the chartered privileges of a trading company, was the minister who advised and proposed a surrender of the best right of a free people, to the very magistracy, which that right, in its exercise, was intended to control.

A bill, which, if not unprecedented in its views, was at least unprecedented in its provisions, passed into law; and that freedom of popular discussion, which in bad times had corrected the abuses, and which in good times had strengthened the measures of government, was subjected to restraints, which, in conjecture, were deemed its destruction; and which it remains to consider, whether experience has not proved to be so: we allude to the proceedings of the 31st of July last, when a meeting, peaceably conducted, was dispersed, and
 indivi-

individuals imprisoned and held to bail, by an authority which has shrunk from the issue, upon the legality of its proceeding—such proceedings were, however, authorised by the bill, or were not authorised by it. If they were authorised by it, let those, who retain any portion of the spirit of their ancestors, reflect upon the principles of a bill, which will justify the dispersion of a meeting peaceably conducted, and which formerly, even in periods the most inauspicious to public liberty, would have been constitutionally and legally assembled. If the bill did not authorise the conduct of the magistrate, let us reflect upon the provisions of a bill, which is so framed as to mislead a magistrate of the experience of Sir W. Addington; who, in the very metropolis, within the reach of the law officers of the crown, to whose opinions he might have resorted, thought himself (for so it must be presumed) warranted to disperse a meeting peaceably conducted, and to imprison individuals, whose temper and conduct, at least, upon that occasion, must entitle them to the approbation of their country. I was of the number of those who opposed that bill, which was accompanied by another, introduced by

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Lord Grenville, and which was of a truly alarming nature; but which was rendered more so by that introduced by Mr. Pitt. The opposition was not conducted in the spirit of party; but it was firm in the spirit of the constitution.

If it be useful, as an eminent writer has remarked, for the purpose of composition, to consider how any distinguished author would have expressed a particular sentiment, I thought it might be profitable to consider how a Maynard, a Somers, a Locke, or a Chatham would have thought and acted in a similar situation to that in which we were upon the first introduction of the minister's bill. I looked back to that period of our history, when the tumult of petitioning was restrained, and the press subjected to a licenser; I found, however, that, even in those times, the right of meeting for the purpose of discussion and remonstrance was respected and inviolate; and I thought that I had there found, not only the extent of the deviation of which a free constitution would allow, but also that which the plea of necessity could possibly presume to require. The venerable
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form of him who, when King William III. remarked that he must have survived all the lawyers of his youth, answered, that he had, and should have survived the law itself had it not been for his majesty's coming, presented itself to my imagination; and I fancied that I heard him solemnly exhorting his country to guard, as the key-stone of its constitution, that right of meeting for the purpose of discussion and remonstrance, which was all that patriotism could save from the wreck of public liberty, whilst our throne was filled by a Stuart; but which had of itself, in its due exercise, proved sufficient to the establishment of the House of Brunswick. I felt the claim, and acted upon it, at least, with the sincerity of conviction; and though all endeavours have hitherto failed, I hope that the time is not far distant, when either the nation may be entrusted with its ancient rights, or, at least, when the provisions which restrain those rights shall be made intelligible to the magistrate who is to execute the law; for I cannot assent to the opinion attributed to a noble and learned lord, who once graced the councils of our sovereign (Lord Thurlow), that bills which are not intelligible in their provisions, cannot

cannot be mischievous in their effects, for experience proves that “ Folly may rush in where “ Wisdom fears to tread ;” and the liberty or life of a fellow-subject, or an important occasion of expressing the public opinion, may be sacrificed to the presumptuous ignorance of an inferior magistrate. But if I cannot assent to the opinion attributed to that noble and learned lord, which I believe to have been intended as consolatory, still less can I assent to the doctrine, imputed falsely, I have no doubt, to another noble and learned person, whose high station renders it his duty to inform the conscience of his sovereign, and entitles him to the most extensive influence in the councils of the nation : I shall not trust to the accuracy of the impression which my mind has received ; but shall faithfully transcribe the passage, as reported in Debrett’s Parliamentary Register, vol. 45, page 205 :—

“ But the noble and learned Lord must be sensible that, in regard to the definition of “ what might, and what might not, be of- “ fences under the act, it would be obviously “ impolitic and unwise to define them with “ such strictness, as should instruct certain “ characters to what precise length they might

“ go, in their attacks on the constitution.”—

I must repeat the conviction, that such a sentiment never entered the mind of the noble and learned lord to whom it is imputed: a doctrine which displays the spirit of a Caligula, and refines upon the devices of his tyranny, could in no place have escaped from the lips of the highest judicial magistrate of a free state; but that he should have maintained such doctrine in a British senate, in the presence of some, whose peculiar duty it is to enforce the sacred precepts of our religion, and to inculcate the charities which they enjoin; of some, to whom the administration of the justice of the nation is confided; and of others, who are constitutionally to be regarded as associated in the task of legislation, in acknowledgment of their own, or of their ancestors' superior virtues: that such doctrine should have been maintained in such a place I think incredible; and that it could be maintained in the presence of such characters without exciting the most marked abhorrence, must be impossible, whilst a single spark of virtue remains amongst them.—The rigor of a law may create a species of tyranny; but if its provisions be clearly defined, the individual

may escape its penalties : but when the provisions of a law are studiously indefinite, they are, indeed, a snare for the unwary ; but do they not also present danger to the most circumspect, and how shall Prudence so shape her course as to avoid it ?

I have dwelt the longer upon this part of the subject, because I verily believe that, had that zeal which manifested itself in assertion of the charter of the East India Company, manifested itself in assertion of the Bill of Rights, we should now have enjoyed what I always have, and must ever regard as the right of all others the most protective of a free constitution. The liberty of the press may be restrained ; the Habeas Corpus act may be repealed ; the trial by jury itself may be abolished : but if the right of popular meetings for the purpose of discussion and remonstrance remain, every other right may be recovered ; but when that right is lost, no other right is secure.

Should I be asked, how I account for the active zeal of the country in its assertion of the respect due to a private charter, and
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for its supineness when a public right of the most important nature was to be suspended? I must admit it to be the effect of an almost unlimited confidence in the minister. But it is of that confidence I complain: the effects of it are felt in our every relation, foreign and domestic. The alarming power of France is to be ascribed to that system which aimed at the destruction of her rights; and the more alarming increased influence of the crown must be ascribed to that profusion, of which, if corruption was not the object, it has proved at least the effect. But if the duty of public inquiry had been discharged, could the minister have procured the public sanction of the system to which France owes that increase of her power which is so dangerous to our safety, or of the measures to which the crown owes that increase of influence which is so alarming to our liberty?

The nation, reflecting that the influence of the crown, when it had not reached nearly its present size, was, by the recorded vote of their representatives, declared to be increased, to be increasing, and that it ought to be diminished, would steadily have opposed a system which not only in-

creased that influence, but which strengthened it with a power of which in all times their ancestors were most distrustful. The erection of barracks in every part of the kingdom would have been regarded as a measure little auspicious to public freedom. Some, indeed, might have consoled themselves with the reflection, that although the constitution had confided the military strength to the crown, it had entrusted the public purse, which was to supply that strength, to the legislature; and such reflection might have consoled, if the unauthorized expenditure of nearly one hundred millions, within the short space of four years, had not suggested that the right of withholding supplies, was a check, which, however sufficient in some periods of our history, might in other circumstances prove wholly inadequate to its purpose. The minister, who having obtained from parliament the sum by himself stated as sufficient to the public exigence, and having a vote of limited credit to answer any unforeseen emergency, feels himself strong enough year after year to pledge the public faith for nearly twice the amount for which he has the sanction and vote of parliament, may be reasonably suspected,

pected of having other reliance than that which the spirit of a free constitution would afford him.

Parliament has, indeed, redeemed the pledge of the minister, and millions have been voted for payment of millions borrowed, without its previous authority: nor are such confirmatory votes to be censured; the reproach belongs to the system which requires them. A vote of limited credit authorises the minister to pledge the public credit to such limited extent; and the minister who exceeds that vote, should at least be prepared to state an urgency so imperious as not to brook even the delay which the forms of parliament might create; for, should the practice prevail, a vote of limited credit would not only be useless as to any good purpose, but may be made the means of accomplishing the worst. A minister, without such vote, might fail of obtaining credit from the individual; or, if he did obtain it, parliament would at least retain the right to investigate the circumstances which had rendered it necessary. But a vote of credit, however limited, may, by a skilful minister, be so employed as to answer every purpose, however
irregular

irregular or unconstitutional: it may be regarded as a sufficient security for each particular advance of its amount; and the individual having no means to ascertain whether its amount has already been raised, the vote which was to guarantee the payment of two millions, may have been so used as to have raised ten millions, or any other sum; and when parliament is required to ratify the engagements of the minister, it must feel itself controlled in the discharge of its public duty, by the consciousness of having, by its vote, possessed the minister of the means of so practising on the confidence of individuals.

Should it be remarked that the vote of credit is in its very nature subject to such species of abuse, it may be answered, that the objection is not to votes of credit, but to the continuing of confidence in a minister, who, year after year, has abused that power which such votes confer. The vote of limited credit is, when constitutionally employed, a measure of provident, and sometimes of indispensable policy. But in its abuse, it may be made the means, if not of superseding, at least of so influencing the deliberations of parliament, upon one of the most grave and interesting

interesting of its functions, as to render that check, which, in the sound state of our constitution, is a most valuable protection, not merely useless, but even burthensome;—for the forms of a free constitution must become a charge whenever the spirit of it is extinct.

If the public mind were steadily applied to the actual situation of the country, abundant reason would appear for distrusting the claim of the minister to the continuance of that confidence which he has so repeatedly demanded, and which the nation has from time to time so prodigally and fatally conferred. That a confiding nation should produce a confiding parliament, is to be expected; and that a minister left free to pursue his own course, should occasionally overstep the line of the constitution, is not to be wondered at: but that a nation should continue to confide in a minister, who withholds all confidence from the nation, and whose every measure has tended to strengthen that influence which the above vote had declared ought to be diminished, and “ whose administration has
 “ added more to the public burthens, and
 “ taken more from the public rights,” than any administration in any former period of our history;

history ; that a nation should continue to confide in such a minister, is one of those events, which, if the historian should venture to record, we hope that posterity, for the honour of their ancestors, will refuse to believe.

As the character of the representative will, however, always in a greater or less degree partake of that of the constituent, let the people seriously reflect upon the circumstances of their situation ; and the representative body will probably perceive the necessity of discharging the duties which arise out of it. Parliament has experienced the effects of confidence in the minister ; let it try what may be effected by confidence in the nation. Let them reflect that the subjects of a state, of which freedom is the direct object, has rights to maintain as well as duties to perform ; and that they who are indifferent to the assertion of their rights, are rarely very active in the discharge of their duties. In order to animate the public mind, and to rouse it to a sense of the public situation, let the legislature restore to the people the right of peaceably meeting, for the purpose of discussion and remonstrance ; and to give greater freedom
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to discussion and remonstrance, let it restore to our state laws their ancient precision and simplicity. Let those who so jealously insist upon the privilege of all money-bills originating in their House, resume to themselves the more valuable privilege of restraining all expenditure for which they have not provided, or which they have not conditionally sanctioned. Let the people reflect upon the blessings of freedom, and cordially cherish the constitution which confers them. Let them reflect, that “innovation, which in old establishments
 “ is seldom expedient, in the constitution of a
 “ state is always dangerous.” But let them distinguish between the spirit of reform and the spirit of innovation, and forbear to brand those as enemies to the constitution who sincerely wish to restore to it that consistency and strength which may deprive every future minister of the means of dismantling its citadel, under the pretext of erecting buttresses for its support. Let them, as an enlightened nation, endeavour to collect from former declarations from the throne and cabinet, what were originally the objects of the war ; and let them from the recent declarations, and from the proceedings of the last negotiation,

attempt to discover what is the obstacle to the attainment of peace. If they should find in the terms of peace a claim on the part of Great Britain, to retain some of the possessions of her former allies, and a steady determination on the part of France to adhere to those treaties by which she has guaranteed the restitution of such possessions to those powers who are now her allies ; let them reflect that one of the assigned causes of the war was the respect due to the sanctity of treaties.

Should it be urged by France, that having forced Spain and Holland into a war, destructive of their trade, and injurious to their possessions, she feels herself bound to make them all the reparation in her power, and that the cession of any part of their ancient territory would be an aggravation of those wrongs of which Great Britain so loudly and indignantly complained ; should France further urge, that, anxious to justify our government's recognition of her competency to maintain the relations of peace and amity, she wishes to mark that respect which is due to her engagements with her allies ; and that a generous nation ought not to complain if she refuses to hazard the loss of
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those favourable sentiments by which she is restored in our councils to the rank of a regular government, and which loss she fears would ensue if she were to accede to an accommodation which would throw upon her allies the weight of every concession which had been demanded from herself, and to purchase her own deliverance from the calamities of war by the sacrifice of those allies to whose fidelity and exertions she is perhaps indebted for the opportunity of negotiating for peace ; if France should attempt thus to justify her conduct in the late negotiation, it will remain for the nation to consider whether such observations are answered by the principles laid down, and reasoning relied upon, by the noble negotiator, on the part of Great Britain. If, indeed, Spain and Holland were disposed to make the cessions demanded, and France opposed the measure, such conduct on the part of France would require further explanation ; but if Spain and Holland not only refuse to make such cessions, but even insist upon the restitution of their respective possessions as a *sine quâ non*, and if France has stipulated to persist in the demand of restitution, and upon the faith of such stipulation was entrusted with

the conduct of the negotiation ; if France, in direct violation of such engagement, had attempted to compel her allies to relinquish their claims, however sincerely I lament the continuance of the war, yet I must confess that if France had so conducted herself ; if in the moment of her success she had made those whom she is accused of having forced into the war, the victims, or rather offerings of peace, such conduct would have afforded, not merely an apology, but a complete justification of that system, which, treating her as destitute of every religious, moral, or social tie, had marked her out to nations as the object of universal detestation and horror.

But such was not the conduct of France ; and Great Britain, whilst she deplores the continuance of war, may console herself that the propriety of the recognition of the competency of France to maintain the relations of peace and amity, is not rendered questionable by her conduct towards Spain and Holland.

The negotiation, however, is broken off ; let the nation understand why, and let the object which in its attainment would possess

us of peace, be clearly defined and manfully avowed; and then let the nation reflect upon the probability of its attainment; and without remarking upon the at least apparent inconsistency of raising new claims, when forced by necessity to abandon our former claims, let the country reflect upon the nature and principle of the demands now insisted upon. Is it to compel France to negotiate according to the established forms of diplomacy? If it be, let the nation reflect, that France, when prostrate, in vain solicited the observance of those forms from his Majesty's ministers, and that they who now complain that France refuses to state their terms of peace, formerly refused to state the provocations and causes of the war. Is the object to compel France to abandon what she has pledged her faith to protect? If such be the nature of the claim, the war must continue until France break her faith, or be so reduced as not to be in a situation to preserve it. Is it to prevent those from acquiring strength in Asia or America, whose strength is already so alarmingly formidable in Europe? Whatever be the object, is it to be considered as a *sine quâ non*? If it be, what is its value in the scale of justice and policy?

The cession of Belgium was last year treated as a *sine quâ non*, and millions of treasure have been expended to secure it ; but the cession of Belgium, the key of Europe, as it was described, is no longer insisted upon. Of the key of India, we have, indeed, at present, possession ; but is the retaining of it of a value equal to what the contest will probably cost ? and will it justify those additional taxes which the industry of the nation is insufficient to answer, and which even the ingenuity of the minister is scarcely able to invent ? But whatever may be the value of the object, may it not be material to consider from whom it is demanded ? Are the possessions of Spain and Holland, forced as those powers are stated to have been by France, into the war, to make atonement for the alleged aggressions of France ? and is a magnanimous nation so degraded as to exact from the unoffending helplessness of Spain and Holland, that indemnity which she dares not claim from the powerful injustice of France ? Is the minister really brought into that situation where he must fail in his demands whether he ground them upon justice or upon force ?

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Does the safety of these realms really depend upon France failing in her engagements to her allies ? or is the necessity of preserving the balance of power to be seriously insisted upon ? But, as already observed, whatever may be the nature of the object, or principle of the policy which is to justify the continuance of the war, let it be avowed, and let the nation reflect gravely upon it. Should France, as it has been thrown out, insist upon the reduction of our naval strength as a *sine quâ non*, such arrogance of pretension would allow but of one opinion and of one line of conduct. The country, however it might reprobate the system, and deplore that imbecility in our councils which had encouraged France to state such pretensions, would still feel that it had resources in its virtues, and energies in its union, which nothing but the want of wisdom to direct them could render unsuccessful, in any contest for its national independence, religion, and liberties.

The naval superiority of Great Britain is essential to her security ; and however degraded she may be in other respects, either by the profligacy or weakness of her ministers, it is

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an advantage which she can never submit to sacrifice, though Europe were combined against her. But when we insist upon our naval strength as essential to our safety, how are we to justify the continuing of the war in order to break down the military strength of France, which may be equally essential to her security? Let the nation reflect upon its actual situation; and if its supineness has contributed to the evils of that situation, let it, after an anxious investigation of the conduct of the present ministry, determine whether they still retain their claim to public confidence, and rising superior to those prejudices which have been artfully excited against individuals, let them regard public talents, when informed by public virtue, as a part, and indeed the most valuable part of the public wealth, and reprobate that system which excludes such talents from the public service. And when the gravest charge, preferred against a man possessing the most splendid, solid, and pre-eminent talents, even by his bitterest enemies, is, that he feels a deeper interest in the liberty of the subject, than in the prerogative of the crown, is urged, let the people reflect whether such sentiment is deserving of their
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censure or of their gratitude ; and let them, by a firm and temperate spirit, in a crisis the most awful that ever threatened the fate of empire, secure the consolation, of which no events can deprive them, that though they may cease to be as happy, they have endeavoured to be as free as their ancestors ; and with the wish that they may be as happy and as free as the emulation of the virtues of a Somers, a Sidney, a Hampden, a Locke, or a Chatham, can entitle them to be, I shall conclude this appeal to that public virtue, by which only happiness or freedom can by a nation be secured or deserved, and the want of which, I have endeavoured to prove to be the root of the evils of our present situation.

THE END.

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